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Chapter I

THE KOL TRIBE OF CENTRAL INDIA

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Distribution and Strength of the Tribe. The Kol tribe, 131
with which this monograph deals, is one of the primitive tribes of Central India. The Central India area, in which they are found, may be described as a triangle with the Nerbudda and the Son rivers for its hypotenuse, having for one of its sides the valley of the Ganges and, for the other, the Chambal river and the Chitor hills. The Kol tribe occupies the north-eastern part of this area. While individual members may be considerably scattered the bulk of the Kols is found in the north of the Central Provinces; in Rewa State, which is included in the Central India Agency; and in the southern portions of the United Provinces adjoining Rewa State. The main centre of distribution for the Kols is Rewa State and the Kols of Central Provinces look back to Rewa as their homeland. The accompanying map of India shows the distribution of the Kols[1]. It will be seen that they belong to the highlands at the northern end of the peninsula. They live among the Vindhya mountains and in the Kaimur hills. These mountains have 133
played an important part in the cultural and ethnological history of 167
India. In early days, before the forests were denuded and the roads cut through, they were an effective barrier to the movements of people. They have been traditionally associated with the southernmost limits of Aryan influence. There is good evidence that they have sheltered some of the oldest races in India since the dawn of history.

The tribe itself should be carefully distinguished from the Munda 101
tribes of Chota Nagpur which are frequently called Kols in the generic sense. There is no specific Kol tribe in that area, although there is a group called the Larka Kols, or Hos, famous for an insurrection in the year 1832, and a part of the district of Singhbhum is called the Kolhan after them. Mention of the specific Kol tribe is made only in the Census Reports of the Central India Agency and that for the Central Provinces. In the United Provinces the Kols are classed as an exterior caste.

The Kols stand second in strength among the Munda tribes of 161
the Central Provinces. According to the 1931 Census the Korkus are 162
first with 176,616 and the Kols follow with 91,556. Among all the tribes in the province the Kols stand eighth in numerical strength. In the Central Provinces as a whole the Census Reports give the following figures for the Kol tribe:

1 Figure 1, p. 2.

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Year	Total	"Hindus"	"Animists"
1891	87,000	No record	No record
1901	65,043	Do.	Do.
1911	82,598	58,679	23,819
1921	96,593	92,117	4,476
1931	91,556	75,757	15,799
1941	93,944	No record	No record

According to the 1931 Census Report the majority of the Kols found in the Central Provinces is living in the Jubbulpore division, and numbers 57,827, of which only 84 persons returned themselves as adhering to Tribal Religions.

In the Central India Agency the Census Report of the Kol population is as follows. The figures from earlier Census Reports are incomplete:

Year	Total	"Hindus"	"Animists"
1921	163,000	..	..
1931	200,249	193,526	6,723
1941	32,076	..	..

The Rewa State in the Central India Agency is the home of the Kols according to their own belief. Of the 200,000 Kols in the Central India Agency, the 1931 report showed that 175,391 were found in Rewa State, and of this number only 861 returned themselves as other than Hindu. The report for Central India in 1931 says that there had been a tendency in the past to classify all aboriginal tribes as 'Gonds,' but that this tendency was carefully checked and adjusted in this report.[1]

In the United Provinces bordering Rewa State, Kols are found in considerable numbers. The figures are as follows, and in the Report no distinction is made in regard to tribal religions: all were returned as Hindu and the group treated as an exterior caste:

Year	Total	Year	Total
1891	68,556	1921	68,941
1901	49,653	1931	76,848
1911	65,647	1941	76,737

These are limited practically to three districts: Mirzapur, with some 38,000; Allahabad with 26,000 and Banda with 11,000. The increase over 1921, which amounts to 11.5% is ascribed to immigration from Rewa State. In the United Provinces Report the Kols are treated as an external or depressed class; elsewhere they are uniformly treated as a forest tribe.

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1 *Census of India*, 1931, XII:1, p. 217. But the 1941 figures show that a new method of classification was followed. At the time of printing the explanation was not available.

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Considering India as a whole the Census Reports give the following figures for the Kols :

Year	Total			
1881 ..	57,420			
1891 ..	143,551			
1901 ..	105,474			
1911 ..	148,245	(Including 23,819 'Animists')		
1921 ..	328,245	Do.	9,944	Do.
1931 ..	368,653	Do.	22,522	Do.[1]
1941 ..	202,757	..	..	..

ORIGIN OF THE KOLS : GENERAL : HISTORICAL DATA. In recent years there has been an active interest in the study of the origin of tribe and race in India. There are still vast fields to be explored, since much mystery surrounds the movements of races in India. This is just as true of the Munda group to which the Kols belong. Mr. Sarat Chandra Roy in his book *The Mundas and Their Country* published in 1912, was one of the first to make a serious study of the traditions of the tribes of Chota Nagpur concerning their origins. He does not find that their oral traditions throw much light upon the name or location of their original home.

One of the legends collected by Roy suggests the place of origin as *Sova Sandi Bir*—'the vast desolate forest.' This vague terminology makes it difficult, if not impossible, to identify any specific locality. It may refer in general to the Highlands of Central India, or even to the dense jungle that is said to have covered parts of the Gangetic Valley. Roy also points out that the Cosmogonic legend of the Munda tribe names a place called *Ajabgarh*—a place first raised out of the primeval ocean, where Sing Bonga, the Supreme deity of the Munda group in Chota Nagpur, created the first parents of the Munda tribe. Roy holds that this idea was probably borrowed from the Hindus and then mixed up with some of the current Munda legends[2]. The Kols of Central India seem to know nothing, or have heard nothing, about Sing Bonga.

Sir William Crooke, in his article on the Kol tribe, gives us the following legendary information[3]. A certain King, Yayati, fifth King of the Lunar race, divided his empire among his five sons. According to the Harivansa, the children of Yayati's son Turuvasu settled in the south. The tenth generation (from, and including

1 *Ibid.*, 1:2, pp. 522, 523.
2 Roy, Sarat Chandra, *The Mundas and Their Country*, p. 12.
3 Crooke, W., *The Tribes and Castes of the North-Western Provinces and Oudh*, Vol. III, pp. 296, 298.

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possibility of marriage with higher Kol groups. It is not at all unlikely that the name is not the title of a *kurhi*, but rather of a type of Kol who, though he may belong to any *kurhi*, uses the above occasions for making a little extra money. One informant assured us that Kulmangans were really Rautiyas.

10. *Swasaha*. The word probably is a corruption of *swastha*, meaning self-reliant, independent. When the word is applied to Kols the inference is that they do not follow the Hinduized customs of most of their tribe in regard to the calling in of the Brahmin priest, the *nai*, and the *dhobi*. All these matters are cared for by some member of their own community, usually one of the elderly persons. We came across one who claimed to be a Swasaha, but as a group they were never found. Some evidence was found which would indicate that this is not a distinct *kurhi*, but is rather something remaining from earlier times. If any family or group is independent of the *pandit*, *nai* or *dhobi* in weddings and the like, they may be called Swasahas. We found evidence which leads us to believe that there are Swasaha Rautiyas. The lower *kurhis* are probably mostly of the *swasaha* type. Nevertheless most of the Kols believe and claim that this is a distinct *kurhi*.

11. *Bhumiya*. The word literally means 'born from the land' or 'aboriginal.' It is also a title of the Bharias, a Munda tribe residing in large numbers in the Jubbulpore district. At present the Bharias are usually associated with the Gonds and are probably very much intermixed with them as the number of names and sub-divisions would indicate. We were unable to elicit any definite information from the Kols about this *kurhi* save that Bhumiyas may sleep either on beds or on the ground. This same title is also found among the Baigas and the Korkus, and the Gonds have a subdivision of this name. Bhumiya and Bhuiya are synonyms.

In connection with the Kols the name may have arisen as a nickname, or a title given to Kols who held land. Certain tribes and some Hindus are said to employ the term Bhuiya as the equivalent for *Zamindar*.[1] There are thus Bhumiyas by tribe and also by title. Roy has written a book on the Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa.[2] They are also Mundas and in view of this fact it is not strange that some Kols should either bear the title of Bhumiya or belong to the Bhumiya *kurhi*. A Bhuiya subcaste bears the name of Rautadi, which is not far removed from Rautiya.

12. *Murha*. Russell and Hiralal state that this is a caste of

1 *Ibid.* Vol. II, p. 306.
2 Roy, S. C., *The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa*, 1935.

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564 navvies and labourers found in Jubbulpore and adjoining districts and [161] numbering about 1,500 persons only. They are connected by some writers with the Bind tribe of northern India and Bengal, but it is more likely that in Central India they are recruited largely from the Kol group. "In Mandla some Murhas seem to be Kols."[1] This caste is [332] employed in all kinds of earthwork, such as building walls, excavating trenches and making embankments for large tanks or for the rice fields. We found that similar work is being done by Kols all over Central India. At Barela there is a large tank covering several acres [312] and called 'Murhai.' Local Kols told us that it was so named because it was dug by Murha Kols many years ago.

13. *Gunj.* Russell and Hiralal not mentioned any group of this name. The 1931 Census has a "Gunjwar" in a long list of tribes and castes, but calls it "Unclassified." It was claimed that the Gunj *kurhi* originally lived in the west and came from thence into Central India. No one interrogated concerning this matter had even met a member of this *kurhi*. It is not unlikely that the name may be a variant of Binj, although one group included both in their list of Kol *kurhis*.

564 14. *Kabiriya.* The word means 'follower of Kabir' and is 794 probably basically a religious group. Kabir was brought up in the home of a Mohammedan weaver (*Julaha*), but through Ramananda came into touch with the theistic and *bhakti* type of faith proclaimed by Ramanuja. He was half-Hindu and half-Moslem and is revered by both. George Weston Briggs notes: "The real importance of Kabir rests in the enormous influence which he has exercised upon subsequent religious thinking, especially as it has affected the masses, because of his use of the vernacular. His attitude toward caste drew to himself a large following from the lower levels of society."[2] This designation on the part of the Kols shows that Kabir's influence had reached them, but the name may have some occupational significance. Kabir was a weaver and two weaver groups in Central Provinces, the Koris and the Koshtis have Kabiriya subgroups.

564 15. *Narchhila.* The name means literally "a cord cutter" and refers to the cutting of the umbilical cord at childbirth. It was stated [844] that the *kurhi* is given the name because it does not call in a midwife from a low Hindu caste to cut the umbilical cord (*nara*) of the newborn child. It seems more likely that this is a general term, as in the case of the Swasahas, for a family in any one of the groups who for

1 Russell and Hiralal, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. IV, p. 253.
2 Briggs, G. W., *The Chamars*, p. 204.